

**Final Report of the Review Panel to the Teaching Council following a review
of the reconceptualised degree programmes submitted for accreditation by
St Patrick's College, Thurles**

BA in Education, Business Studies and Accounting (TH002)

BA in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies (TH003)

BA in Education, Irish and Religious Studies (TH004)

BA in Education, Irish and Business Studies (TH005)

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1. Background

The Teaching Council is the statutory body charged with setting the standards for entry to the teaching profession and ensuring that these standards are upheld.

In accordance with Section 38 of the Teaching Council Act, 2001, the Council shall:

- (a) review and accredit the programmes of teacher education and training provided by institutions of higher education and training in the State,
- (b) review the standards of education and training appropriate to a person entering a programme of teacher education and training, and
- (c) review the standards of knowledge, skill and competence required for the practice of teaching,

and shall advise the Minister and, as it considers appropriate, the institutions concerned.

The Teaching Council's role in relation to the review and accreditation of programmes of initial teacher education (ITE) is distinct from the academic accreditation which programmes also undergo. Academic accreditation is based on the suitability of a programme for the award of a degree/diploma, whereas professional accreditation for any profession is a judgement as to whether a programme prepares one for entry into that profession.

The review and accreditation of ITE programmes by the Teaching Council provides an opportunity for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to demonstrate that they offer quality programmes of teacher education. It is expected that the graduates of such programmes will achieve programme aims and learning outcomes which are aligned with the values, professional dispositions and the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence which are central to the practice of teaching.

In order to guide its review of programmes, the Teaching Council has published *Initial Teacher Education: Strategy for the Review and Accreditation of Programmes* (hereinafter referred to as the Council's review strategy). That document sets out the process by which programmes are reviewed. The criteria against which reviews take place are set out in a second document: *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (hereinafter referred to as the Council's criteria). This document, which will apply to existing and new programmes (from 2012 in the case of concurrent programmes and 2014 in the case of consecutive programmes), relates to a range of areas including programme design, areas of study, the duration of programmes, the numbers and qualifications of staff, facilities and resources. Significantly, the criteria:

- prescribe those areas of study which will be mandatory in programmes, including numeracy and literacy, behaviour management, parents in education, ICT and inclusive education
- set out, for the first time, the expected learning outcomes for graduates of all teacher education programmes
- propose raising the minimum requirements for persons entering programmes of initial teacher education at primary level and a literacy and numeracy admissions test for mature entrants
- require a 15:1 student-staff ratio
- call for the development of a new and innovative school placement model, involving active collaboration between HEIs and schools and an enhanced role for the teaching profession in the provision of structured support for student teachers
- require that student teachers should spend at least 25% of the programme on school placement, and that such placements should be in a minimum of two schools
- require increased emphasis on research, portfolio work and other strategic priorities.

Providers of existing programmes have been asked to reconceptualise their programmes in line with the revised criteria and to re-submit them for accreditation. All providers have made a declaration to the Teaching Council that the criteria will be fulfilled and guidelines followed in respect of all of their programmes.

In parallel with the drafting of the Council's review strategy and its criteria for ITE, the Council has also published its *Policy Paper on the Continuum of Teacher Education*, which sets out its vision for teacher education at all stages of the continuum – ITE, Induction and Continuing Professional Development.

In 2012, the Council published *Teaching Council Requirements for Entry onto a Programme of Initial Teacher Education*, which set out the Council's revised subject criteria in draft form. Although not yet finalised, the draft criteria represent the Council's latest thinking in this area and have guided providers of post-primary concurrent programmes in determining the subject content coverage which is appropriate.

2. Publication of this Report

The Teaching Council routinely makes information available to the public in relation to its functions and activities and, in line with that practice, this report will be available on the Council's website, www.teachingcouncil.ie.

3. Overview of the Review Process

This report relates to the review of the four degree programmes provided by St. Patrick's College in Thurles – BA in Education, Business Studies and Accounting (TH002), BA in Education, Business Studies and Religious Studies (TH003), BA in Education, Irish and Religious Studies (TH004), and BA in Education, Irish and Business Studies (TH005) - hereinafter referred to as 'the programmes'. The review took place between August and November 2012, in accordance with the Council's review strategy. The process was formally initiated when the Review Panel (hereinafter referred to as 'the panel') was appointed by the Teaching Council's director, with Professor Sheelagh Drudy as Chairperson.¹ To assist and support the work of the panel, Dr Patrick O'Connor was appointed as Rapporteur. His functions included liaison with St. Patrick's College, maintaining records of meetings, and drafting and finalising the panel's report in conjunction with the panel Chairperson. The panel was also supported in its deliberations by external subject experts and by the Director and staff of the Teaching Council.

Documentation relating to the application was submitted to the Teaching Council by St Patrick's College, Thurles (hereinafter also referred to as 'the college' or 'SPCT'), on 26 June 2012. The panel met initially on 30 August 2012 to give preliminary consideration to the SPCT submission. Following this meeting, individual members of the panel focused on specific aspects of the submission and circulated their comments and questions to other members of the panel. Issues for further clarification were identified by the panel and were communicated by the Rapporteur to the SPCT Head of Education. A second panel meeting was held on 24 September 2012. Following further consideration of the documentation and a collation of the initial views of the members of the panel, the Chairperson, Professor Drudy, and the Rapporteur, Dr O'Connor, visited the college on 8 October 2012 and engaged with staff members who made a presentation embracing the several elements of the programmes.² Professor Drudy and Dr O'Connor also engaged with a cross-section of students from across the different programmes in the college. This was a visit that had as its primary objective the clarification of issues arising from the documentation. In the course of reviewing the documentation the panel maintained contact on a systematic basis both by e-mail and audio-link. A further meeting of the panel was held on 17 October 2012. On 22 October 2012, the Chairpersons of three review panels and their Rapporteurs attended a final meeting convened for the primary purpose of identifying commonalities of judgement and a refining of reporting conventions and procedures.

4. Documentation

The documentation submitted by SPCT adhered to the template provided by the Teaching Council in the Pro Forma and Guidelines which accompany the Council's review strategy.

¹ Details of the Review Panel membership are included in Appendix I

² A list of the staff member presenters is included in Appendix II

However, the formatting of the document submitted by the college lacked cohesion. The documentation was voluminous and its presentation led to an unfortunate difficulty in navigating the various sections and identifying referenced material.

The key areas of focus were:

- Conceptual Framework
- Programme Aims and Learning Outcomes
- Programme Design
- Main Features of the Programme
- Areas of Study
- School placement
- Student Support and Guidance Systems
- Student Intake and Admissions Criteria
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment Approaches
- Staffing
- Facilities
- Financial Resources
- Engagement of Student Teachers with Staff and with other Student Teachers
- Progression within the Programme
- Personal and Social Development
- Outcomes

5. Overall Finding

Having regard to the documentation that was initially submitted, together with the complementary documentation that was provided pursuant to the visit to the college, the panel adjudges that in broad outline the four programmes satisfy the criteria set down by the Teaching Council in its *Criteria and Guidelines* and in the draft curricular subject requirements. Accordingly, it recommends to the Teaching Council that the four programmes (TH002, TH003, TH004, and TH005) be granted accreditation, subject to the stipulations which are set out in Section 8 (see below).

The commendations in section 6 below relate to areas of particular strength which the panel has identified.

With regard to the recommendations in section 7, the panel suggests that the Teaching Council should require the college to set out and submit, within twelve months of receiving the final review report, its proposals for implementing the recommendations. It further recommends that the Teaching Council should set out in order of priority those areas to be accorded particular attention when the programme falls due for re-accreditation.

The stipulations in section 8 relate to areas which the panel believes to be of such strategic importance to the programme that accreditation should be subject to those stipulations being met. Therefore, the panel recommends that the Teaching Council should require the

college to set out and submit to the Teaching Council its proposals for implementing the stipulations within two months of receiving the final review report.

In the case of the national issues raised in section 9 of this report, the panel recommends that the Council engage in dialogue on those issues at national level.

The panel proposes that accreditation of the programmes would have a lifespan of five years.

6. Commendations

Having regard to:

1. the documentation which was submitted
2. advice received from the subject specialists who supported the review process, and
3. information gleaned during the visit to the college,

the panel has noted a number of particular strengths of the programme, as follows:

6.1 The philosophical underpinning

The college is commended for its promotion of a student-centred, social-constructivist approach that is based on cognitive views of learning. Individual reflection, problem-based learning and small group work form an important part of the endeavour, and the core values of trust, care, respect and integrity constitute an integral part of each programme.

6.2 Commitment of staff

The panel commends the enthusiasm of the department heads who made presentations during the visit of panel members. They exhibited an impressive level of commitment to the delivery and systematic development of a high quality programme and it was clear that they viewed the review as an important opportunity to collectively reflect on various aspects of their programmes. It is understood that staff and expertise are willingly shared between departments and in no small way this facilitates an appropriate integration of theory and practice across the four programmes.

6.3 Students' perceptions

The students drawn from the various courses exhibited a high level of interest and enthusiasm for their programmes. They commended the relevant department staff for their availability and their generous level of support on a personal and professional level. The panel considers that this opinion has a solid basis and commends the staff for an admirable student-centred focus that has due regard for student voice.

6.4 Recognition of opportunities afforded by link with UL

Recognising that its size and resources must of necessity place a limit on ambitious intentions, the college clearly values relationships with the University of Limerick (UL) that have been established in the course of the last year since the university first undertook academic accreditation of its programmes. UL now chairs examination board meetings and there are reciprocal arrangements in respect of academic council affairs as UL is represented on the SPCT Academic Council and vice versa. The panel endorses the cultivation of this relationship and sees therein a rich potential for development in what may become a vibrant collaboration between the two institutions. The panel considers that the linkage with UL would be particularly beneficial for SPCT in facilitating an interaction with the faculties/subject departments in the university and in allowing for an extension of ICT arrangements leading ultimately to the introduction of blended learning as an important element of its suite of programmes.

6.5 School placement

6.5.1 School settings

In respect of all programmes, the panel commends the logistical framework underpinning school placement and, with it, the arrangements for ensuring that only those students deemed adequately prepared for placement are allowed entry to schools. In practice, this means that only those students whose continuous assessment demonstrates that they have reached a particular standard in respect of planning and attendance undertake school placement. These students are afforded the opportunity to teach in a variety of school settings over the four years, and this includes a useful two-week observation and teaching period in a primary school during the first year. During the placement students are encouraged to participate actively in the life of the schools and they report that the experience is enlightening and enriching. Commendably, the college has established positive relationships with the post-primary schools in its area and this relieves the students of the common problem of securing a practice base.

6.5.2 School placement handbook

The college has produced a school placement handbook that proved most useful in determining the breadth and depth of procedures. Its comprehensive *Student Handbook* proved most informative also. Both documents usefully outline the core elements of good practice in the placement schools, the responsibilities of students and the supports available to them from co-operating teachers and placement tutors. A particular strength is seen in the handbooks' treatment of reflective practice. There is clear direction for students on how best they might benefit from its rich potential for self-evaluation linked to action leading to enhanced levels of practice.

6.5.3 HEI placement tutors

Appropriately, all placement tutors have a teaching qualification and recent, relevant experience. Attendance at annual induction programmes is mandatory, as well as a measure of engagement in personal development. Particularly commendable is the induction arrangement that affords each new tutor a colleague mentor. Further, all tutors are required to attend regular training meetings to facilitate a necessary commonality of

approach between tutors. In the course of each of the first three years, a tutor pays two visits and in the fourth year the number of visits increases to four, with the involvement of two tutors in the final assessment. Appropriately, the college endeavours to ensure that one of these tutors at least is a subject specialist. The panel was pleased to learn from students that each visit is followed by a critical and well-balanced analysis of the lesson and that this is further developed on their return to the college.

6.6 Assessment and evaluation

The panel is pleased to note that the college places a high premium on assessment and evaluation. This is reflected in systematic formative assessment as an important element of its continuous assessment arrangements. This is evident too in the promotion of self- and peer- evaluation and in the critical analysis of the teaching portfolios. Here, in accordance with best practice, lecturers provide constructive feedback (written and/or verbal) that highlights the direction of future development.

6.7 Student academic supports

The panel notes with satisfaction that there is an Irish language resource centre, 'An tIonad Acmhainne', which provides one-to-one tuition by lecturing staff, and in addition to this there is an arrangement for the support of students who are encountering difficulty in Mathematics. Further, there is a 'Writing and Literacy Resource Centre' which functions as a 'drop in' arrangement dedicated to providing support in respect of writing and literacy skills.

6.8 Exit award strategy

The panel is pleased that there is an exit award strategy whereby a student who fails to meet the professional standards of the programme may opt to receive a UL award – at certificate, diploma or degree level – that recognises credits successfully completed (in these circumstances the degree carries a Level 7 designation). Appropriately, due to its importance and relevance, a student must secure a pass in the school placement element of the programme in order to proceed. In the event of a student passing on repeat, an experienced staff member is appointed as mentor. This is a commendable arrangement.

6.9 Teaching facilities

An examination of the inventory of college teaching facilities shows there is ample accommodation available to provide for current needs. The main building presents as a well-maintained, comfortable structure and the spacious common areas contribute to the creation of an attractive ambience conducive to scholarship and positive student interaction.

6.10 Enrolment of mature students

The commitment to the inclusion of mature students is commendable, and no less than 32 of the current enrolment of 230 students are in this category.

7. Recommendations

Having regard to:

1. the documentation which was submitted
2. advice received from the subject specialists who supported the review process, and
3. information gleaned during the visit to the college,

the panel has noted a number of areas of the programme which it recommends be developed. They are as follows:

7.1 The philosophical underpinning

The panel is in no doubt that that heads of departments share a commonality of understanding in respect of the conceptual framework underpinning the programmes, but it is regrettable that the submission document provides only a limited exposition of the principles, beliefs and values about education that characterise their work. It would be advantageous if these were brought more clearly and fully into focus so that there could be a greater confidence that the work of all staff members will more easily align with the strong sense of moral purpose that was apparent during the visit to the college. In an effort to address this issue, the college might present in matrix form, how and where each programme facilitates the absorption of attitudes, values and professional dispositions that are embedded somewhere in all programmes. This might usefully be coupled with a greater elaboration on the beliefs relating to teaching and learning that underpin the work of the college and should be incorporated into the student handbook.

7.2 School placement

7.2.1 Placement assessment criteria

The panel recommends that the criteria for assessment of performance on school placement are subject to ongoing review and development and that such amendments that are made to the criteria be incorporated into tutor induction and continuing professional development programmes, with due regard for clarity in respect of learning outcomes.

7.2.2 Video analysis of student teaching

The panel acknowledges that micro-teaching is used in preparation for school placement and recommends that the college give consideration to extending the use of video analysis to students teaching in the placement schools, with appropriate ethical procedures.

7.2.3 Memorandum of understanding with placement schools

The panel recommends that, in respect of all programmes, a memorandum of understanding between college and schools should be produced. This might usefully include

a greater level of specificity relating to the role of the course providers, HEI placement tutors, principals as instructional leaders, and co-operating teachers.

7.3 Inclusion, diversity and children's rights

Inclusion and diversity feature in the Education programme across all four years as is evidenced in the organisation of workshops on inclusion and traveller education. Also, the panel is in no doubt that children's rights and their right to a voice in various matters that relate to their lives are given place. However, it is not readily apparent that these important issues are accorded the level of prominence that is appropriate, nor is it readily apparent that there is an appropriate emphasis on best practice in multicultural classrooms. Accordingly, the panel recommends that the college reviews its planning and delivery to give assurance that these elements are treated in a purposeful and systematic manner.

7.4 Literacy and Numeracy

It is accepted that each programme indicates a literacy and numeracy content. However, it is the view of the panel that an elaboration of how best this might be addressed across all the programmes would be advantageous. This would promote more systematic attention to the demands which the DES national strategy *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* places on the post primary teacher. In addition, in an effort to promote a commonality of practice and a more focused attention to what is critical, the placement tutor templates should reflect a higher level of detail in respect of what is expected of the student.

7.5 ICT

The panel readily acknowledges the commitment of staff to the deployment of ICT in the promotion of learning across and within all programmes. While recognising the challenge that this represents to an institution of this size, it recommends that a more widespread use of the technology as a teaching and learning tool should feature in development plans. To that end, the panel recommends that the college should continue to strengthen its relationship with UL and also invest in ICT software, such as Moodle or Blackboard, which would support teaching and learning and which would facilitate online and blended learning.

7.6 Support for Staff Development and Research

The panel acknowledges the support already provided for staff development and research. It recommends that this support be increased to ensure that staff are enabled to attend and present their research at national and international education conferences and to publish in internationally recognised peer-reviewed professional journals.

7.7 Child Protection Guidelines

It is recommended that the programmes incorporate specific reference to Child Protection Guidelines and attendant literature.

7.8 Religious Studies

It is clear that the Religious Studies provision covers in detail the stipulated areas for post-primary teaching. It is also acknowledged that these inputs include material on current issues relating to the teaching of the subject, as well as reference to current debates and international reports. However, at times details on pedagogies of Religious Studies or methodological issues were not readily visible in the materials submitted. The panel is assured that the college has inputs on, for example, the Toledo guidelines on teaching Religious Education and introduces a variety of approaches to RE (such as the phenomenological, interpretive or postmodern). This was not readily apparent in the initial submission but has subsequently been clarified.

7.9 Business Studies

The panel recommends the following:

The syllabus and learning outcomes for the module Business Information Systems (BS312) in the supplied documentation of the degree suggests that the content is cognitive. While this is helpful and necessary, the Teaching Council requires the application of ICT in Business. Accordingly, the panel recommends that there needs to be somewhere in the degree the necessary practical 'know-how and skills development' learning outcomes, achieved through the application of relevant ICT software to the solution of Business problems.

7.10 Gaeilge

The panel recommends the following:

The panel notes the comprehensive range of supports provided to students to enable them develop their linguistic competencies (including, for example, the modules *An Ghaeilge Scríofa agus Labhartha (1)* and *An Ghaeilge Scríofa agus Labhartha (2)* (NG111 and NG211)). In the context of changes to the school syllabus and modalities of assessment, however, it is desirable that the emphasis on translation in modules *An Ghaeilge agus An Litríocht Chráifeach* and *An Ghaeilge agus An Imirce* (NG321 and NG421) be reduced to allow for a greater emphasis on oral competence.

7.11 Accounting

The panel recommends the following:

The syllabus and learning outcomes for the module Business Information Systems (BS312) in the supplied documentation of the degree suggests that the content is cognitive. While this is helpful and necessary, the Teaching Council requirement is that the application of ICT in Business is necessary. Accordingly, the panel recommends that somewhere in the degree there needs to be the necessary practical 'know-how and skills development' learning outcomes, achieved through the application of relevant ICT software to the solution of Accounting problems.

8. Stipulations

Having regard to:

1. the documentation which was submitted
2. advice received from the subject specialists who advised the panel, and
3. information gleaned during the visit to the college,

the panel has noted a number of areas of the programme which it considers must be addressed prior to commencement of the programme.

8.1 Business in TH003 and TH005

The panel recommends to the Teaching Council that the programme be granted accreditation for the teaching of Business Studies, subject to the college confirming that the following stipulations in TH003 and TH005 are being implemented to meet the criteria specified by the Council.

There is a shortfall in the Business Studies subjects in TH003 and TH005, not in terms of the overall credits for Business Studies but in terms of the inclusion of a required Accounting element, i.e., a shortfall of 5 – 10 ECTS credits related to the teaching of Unit 4 of the Leaving Certificate Business Syllabus 'Monitoring the Business'.

This requires:

- Use, understanding and interpretation of accountancy and business data.
- Basic final accounts and balance sheets.
- Main profitability and liquidity ratios.
- Debt equity ratio.

This shortfall has arisen because the accounting related subjects of TH002 have been replaced by Religious Studies subjects in TH003, and by Modern Irish subjects in TH005.

In order to meet the requirements for recognition, these accounting elements, particularly the fundamental accounting ones from years 1 and 2, need to be covered both in TH003 and TH005. The College should consider how to integrate them into the Business-related syllabi in TH003 and TH005. It may be helpful in this regard to note that some aspects of BS421 Strategic Management, for example, while important Management topics, are not required for the teaching of the Leaving Certificate Business Syllabus.

9. National Issues

9.1 School Placement

The Review Panel recommends to the Teaching Council that the roles and responsibilities of HEIs, principals and co-operating teachers should be examined and a set of national guidelines produced that outline what is expected of each. This would usefully facilitate a commonality of practice that could enhance school placement arrangement.

9.2 Gaeltacht Residency Requirement

The requirement of a three-month residency in the Gaeltacht is particularly onerous in financial terms for some students and the Council might explore how best their concerns might be addressed.

9.3 Review of Accreditation Criteria for Concurrent Post-primary Programmes

The panel recommends that the accreditation criteria for concurrent post-primary programmes be reviewed. Formerly, four-year concurrent programmes at post-primary would have assumed an equivalence with an undergraduate degree followed by a post-graduate diploma in education (i.e. 180/240 ECTS, followed by 60 ECTS). From 2013 onwards consecutive programmes will consist of 180/240 ECTS (undergraduate degree) and 120 ECTS (postgraduate diploma). However, concurrent post-primary programmes will consist of 240 ECTS, of which 120 will be comprised of education components and 120 of subject discipline components. The panel warmly endorses the increase in education components in both concurrent and consecutive programmes. However, equivalence can no longer be automatically assumed with regard to the coverage of subject disciplines. This is an issue which the panel feels should be addressed by the Teaching Council in consultation with the HEIs. It has already been raised by the Council in a letter to the HEIs of 15/06/2012 under the heading of 'Balance of programme components'. The issue of anomalies is raised and the Council notes that some HEIs are planning to develop 'innovative five year programmes'. It should be noted that such proposed five year programmes contain elements at Level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

9.4 Curriculum Design and Assessment

In the context of the proposed changes to the Junior Certificate programme, and of international best practice, all teacher education programmes should be required to make visible their approach to curriculum design and assessment. In practical terms, this requires a greater emphasis on the theory and practice of formative and summative assessment and on the uses and limitations of testing. The Teaching Council's criteria and associated Pro Forma and Guidelines should be kept under review, having regard to the evolving context for the junior cycle.

Appendix I – Review Panel Membership

Independent Review Panel Chair	Professor Sheelagh Drudy , Emeritus Professor of Education at University College Dublin and former Head of the School of Education and Director of the Postgraduate Diploma in Education. Professor Drudy is a former teacher, educational researcher and teacher educator. She was a member of the first Teaching Council appointed by the Minister in 2005. She is currently an external examiner at a number of higher education institutions and has been involved in quality assurance reviews in various HEIs.
One external expert from equivalent teacher education programmes, where possible in another jurisdiction	Dr Graeme Nixon , University of Aberdeen. Lecturer and Subject leader for the PGDE (Secondary), PGDE (Primary), B.Ed.(Primary) Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies and Programme Director of the MSc Studies in Mindfulness, University of Aberdeen. Graeme has experience in the assessment of school experience and the accreditation process for specialist teachers of Religious and Moral Education in secondary schools. Graeme also has considerable experience of the Teaching Council's review and accreditation role having participated on a review panel for the review of the Bachelor of Religious Education in Mater Dei in 2011.
A person with expertise in the support and/ or evaluation of teaching and learning at second level in the sector/ subject in question	Eibhlín Ní Scannláin , post-primary Inspector of Irish, Department of Education and Skills. Eibhlín is also assigned to the Department's Teacher Education Section.
Rapporteur	Dr Patrick O'Connor , former school principal and Divisional Inspector, DES, and rapporteur for the panel

Appendix II – St Patrick’s College staff who made a presentation during the visit on 8 October 2012

Dr Jennifer Johnston	Head of Education
Ms Paula Hourigan	Registrar
Ms Laoise Ní Cheallaigh	Ceann Roinn na Nua-Ghaeilge
Dr Rebecca Purcell	Head of Business
Ms Diane Corkery	Head of Religious Studies
Dr Louise Heeran Flynn	Head of School Placement
Dr Mary Roche	Senior Lecturer Education
Dr Mary Shanahan	Lecturer Religious Studies